

cast its future. So it will be seen that there is no loss in the number of country churches strictly so called in this section. Four village churches which had a name, but never a local habitation, after a few years existence, passed away, but more than a dozen other village churches came into life and most of them are doing efficient service today. In the three Presbyteries referred to, there are several country churches, in the strictest sense of the term, that have increased in membership in the last quarter century, from 30 to 150 per cent. and have doubled or trebled the amount paid their pastors and have increased their benevolent contributions even more largely, in some cases. And yet a recent writer tells us that "The rural church has been remiss in seizing its opportunity and in discharging its obligation. Its message has been effete and lifeless." A charge, alas! too true of the country church, and possibly of the city church as well. For instance: Some years ago a preacher was spending a Sunday in the capital city of a great southern State. At night he attended the First Presbyterian church, which had nearly 500 members, and was located in the heart of the city. He and about fifty or sixty more people heard an excellent sermon from the gifted and earnest pastor. Going to and from the church he saw hundreds of people on the streets utterly untouched by that or any other church. One Sunday night in each month that preacher preached to about as many who came to a little country church, in the darkness, and over country roads, some a distance of three miles or more, perhaps.

A non-resident ministry is not an unmixed evil, especially with the smaller churches. Even though he goes only once a month if he is an active pastor he comes into closer touch with the home life of his people and hence knows them better, than if he lived in the same village or community. Suppose he spends Saturday night with one family, dines with another on Sunday; visits any who may be sick Sunday afternoon and spends Sunday night at still another home; when he leaves Monday morning he has visited several families and has come closer to them than if he lived only a block away in town and made a pop call of quarter or half an hour three or four times a year. And many who have lived in the country and entertained the preacher realize the difference, too, when they move to the town or city.

In general, perhaps, the type of church service will easily adapt itself to the kind of congregation either in city or country. The writer heard a distinguished minister say some years ago that he did not find "dignity" given as one of the fruits of the Spirit; and yet a true reverence for God and His sanctuary should, and usually does, mark the worship in country churches, as sincere, if not so formal, as is sometimes found in the city. Country people may not move so rapidly as do the city folks, but they move, and while they may not take readily to every fad that is proposed they are steadily developing in material and in religious lines. But it must be disheartening to them to be criticised so severely, and receive no credit for the progress they are making.

In the section of country which has been referred to there are more Presbyterians in the country and small towns than there were forty years ago. The sister denominations have grown in their numbers, and greatly in efficiency. Far more interest is taken in the Sunday-school work in all the denominations than even twenty years ago, I think. The country church may be dead and dying in some parts of the country, but not generally, I believe.

I have written of only a limited section. Other parts of the South may be much worse off, but I cannot believe the decline is anything like general.

The remedies suggested are many of them just what have been practiced by country pastors and churches for generations. In the section referred to, annual protracted meetings have been held for, lo! these many years; and the pastors have been very active in educational matters and awake to every moral question, and ready to suggest wisely along agricultural lines. The public schools, and the United States and State governments, are co-operating with them in organizing and encouraging corn, pig and tomato clubs, so that so far, the Church of Christ has been spared the necessity of branching out along these lines. May it ever be so preserved and enabled to prosecute its far higher mission in spiritual things.

And, after all, the critics of the country church and pastor frankly admit that "six out of every seven ministers are furnished by the country church." Surely it is time for alarm for the whole Church, when "sick and dying" as the diagnosticians are agreed that the country church is, it must still furnish 85 out of every 100 preachers. And it is a well recognized fact that a large per cent. of the best and most attractive workers in the town and city churches have gone from the country and villages.

The fact is that the country church has its weak points and many short-comings, that need to be corrected and are being gradually corrected. It is well to have them pointed out in a sympathetic way and remedies suggested. These statements would apply to city churches as well. All have their perplexing problems and need the wisdom that cometh down from above for their solution.

"There is so much bad in the best of us;  
And so much good in the worst of us;  
That it ill becomes any of us,  
To talk about the rest of us."

T.

### THE COUNTRY PASTOR.

By Rev. S. B. Lander.

In the Presbyterian of the South of February 21st an editorial, under the caption, "The Country Pastor," appeared which was worthy of the warmest commendation. Not because it provided a solution of the country pastor's many problems, but because it administered a deserved rebuke to those who feel competent to solve those problems for him off hand. The problems are real and insistent. They need solution, and any plan which will tend to solve them will be applauded by the vast army of country ministers throughout this country.

The writer is a country pastor. He has been such ever since he graduated from the Kentucky Seminary at Louisville in May, 1908. The past nine years have taught him some few facts about a country field. He does not pretend to have found a cure-all for the needs of the country church. He has discovered, however, that country churches do not call farm agents for their pastors any more than city churches call factory superintendents, bank presidents or directors of corporations. Any attempt upon the pastor's part to direct agriculture in his field would be resented as an unwarranted intrusion quite as quickly and effectively as a city business man would rebuke the minister's effort to direct his business for him.

Not long ago a gentleman told the writer he ought to question his people's zeal for the employment of up-to-date methods in farming. He was disposed to be rather severe with him because he declined to do so. Upon returning home the writer instituted a comparison between the growth in membership of this gentleman's church and his own covering the past eight years. The minister of Louisville Presbytery showed his church had made a net increase of less than 10 per cent., while the country church had gained 21 per cent. on confession of faith. This surely is impressive. It surely teaches all of us that preaching the gospel and attending to the other work of the ministry gets results in the country no less than in our larger towns and cities.

This country field is one of the oldest in the State. The mother church—Old Big Spring—was organized in 1794. It is two years older than Washington city, twenty-one years older than the first Presbyterian church to be organized in the city of Louisville and still flourishes. It has had sixteen pastors in almost a century and a quarter. It has given many of its sons to the Presbyterian ministry, many others have become honored elders and deacons in various parts of this and other States, and its early pastors established all the churches in Nelson, Washington, Spencer and Shelby counties. In short, Big Spring is the mother of Presbyterianism in this part of Kentucky.

These men of God did not accomplish this magnificent work teaching agriculture, but preaching and teaching the word of God.

The country pastor lacks training which would render him competent to direct farming and stock raising. If he doesn't know it, then he is the only person unaware of it in his community. But if he were competent, he would not find time to do it, except at the sacrifice of duties imposed upon him by his sacred office. The country preacher has quite as much to do, if he will but do it, as any other minister. If he will meet his duties and responsibilities with vigor and good judgment, as well as with faith and love, gratifying results will follow.

There are many physicians who seem able to diagnose our troubles—and it is not difficult to discover them. Some even suggest remedies with an air of assurance which implies they are confident they can cure all our ills. But no theorizing such as you so justly rebuked will avail. Besides, the country churches are winning quite as many souls for Christ as they ever did, and more than many large town and city churches with their superior equipment, their better trained workers and their larger opportunities.

The writer is pastor of the Big Spring and Bloomfield churches. He has been doing his level best for nearly nine years. He sees the needs of the country church. He has addressed himself to them with such wisdom and strength as God has given him. He has not found a remedy that promised any real improvement in everything that is wrong, but the wise counsel and untiring co-operation of his elders and deacons have resulted in many radical improvements in our methods and definite progress has been made in dealing with conditions as they arise. We are constantly on the lookout for better plans than our own—for more effective remedies than we have discovered. We pray that God will raise up some Joshua to lead us, some physician to heal. We do not want "our hurt to be healed slightly." We want a permanent cure. We know not from whence it will come, but at the present the writer feels pretty confident Joshua will not be a farm agent, when he does come, nor will he be an expert in animal industry.

Bloomfield, Ky.